

Using Audacity in the Classroom

Making the most of those nuisance iPods- Giving feedback to students using Audacity and saving as Mp3 files

What is Audacity?

Audacity is a free downloadable program which enables you to record sound bites and save them in the compressed MP3 format. Students can then make use of their iPods to copy and listen to the file. Additionally, any computer has a default program like Windows Media Player which will play the sound bite, with or without headphones. The headphones help eliminate outside noises. Mp3 format means that the sound bite is compatible with both PC or Mac computers.

How can this help me as a teacher?

- I can record responses to students' work when I want to, at home or work, as long as I have a headset and the program installed.
- In annotating their own essays students are forced to listen to, and then note down, the areas where correction is needed. Students are expected to make corrections, reprint their paper and hand in both an annotated copy and the final, proving they have listened to and made use of the file.
- When you speak for 10 minutes you can say so much more than you ever write on a paper.
- Students can record orals which makes it ideal for foreign language teachers and students can listen to orals.
- Music students can record samples as long as they have a microphone.

What appeal does Audacity have for students?

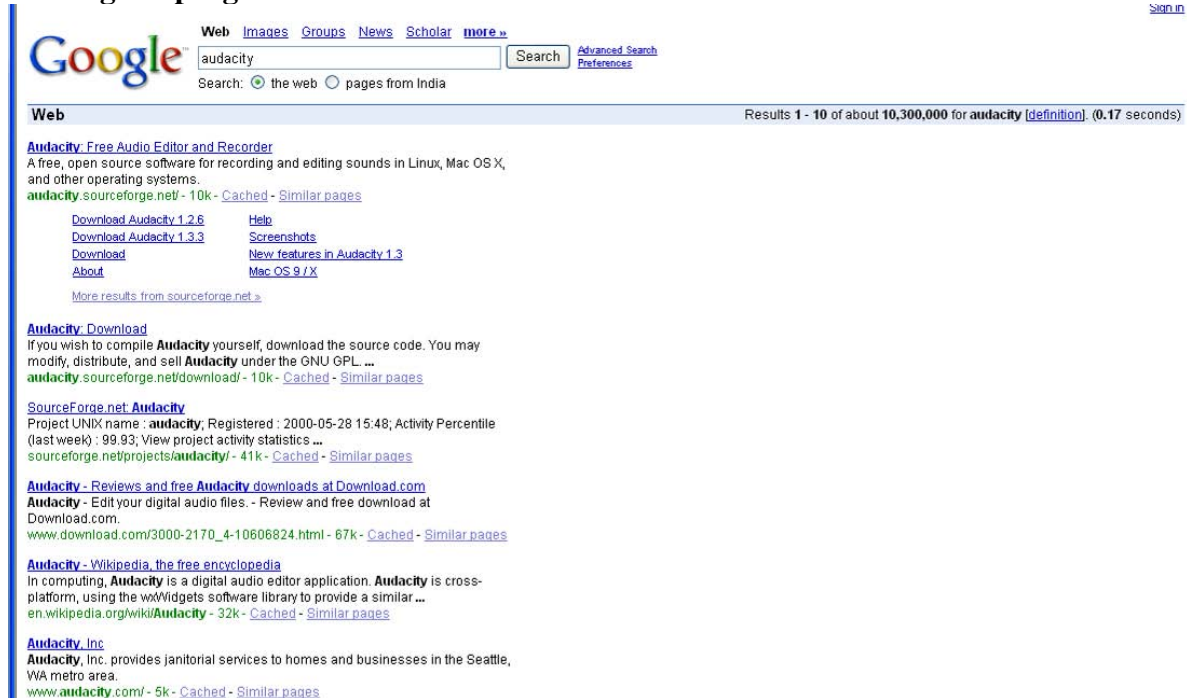
- Kids use their iPods all the time and they really like this approach.
- You get to hook into a technology with which many kids are familiar.
- Students get a chance to listen to a sound bite several times to extract all information they need.
- Students can also make recordings for homework.
- This method appeals to students with different learning styles

How does one get started?

Audacity is a freely available program from the internet. Once you have installed the program you must also make sure you download the LAME Mp3 encoder . What this does is enable the files to be compressed and then they can also be opened by any computer, with or without the Audacity program. The compressed file also means you can send a file, up to 9 minutes in length, as an email attachment.

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Finding the program:



The screenshot shows a Google search for 'audacity'. The search results include links to the Audacity website, SourceForge, and Wikipedia. The Audacity website link is highlighted, showing download links for Audacity 1.2.6 and 1.3.3. The SourceForge link shows project information for Audacity, including the project name, registered date, and activity percentile. The Wikipedia link shows the definition of Audacity as a digital audio editor application.

Copy this URL to link to a download for a copy of the LAME **MP3** encoder:
http://www.gaclrecords.org.uk/lame_enc.dll

Once Downloaded



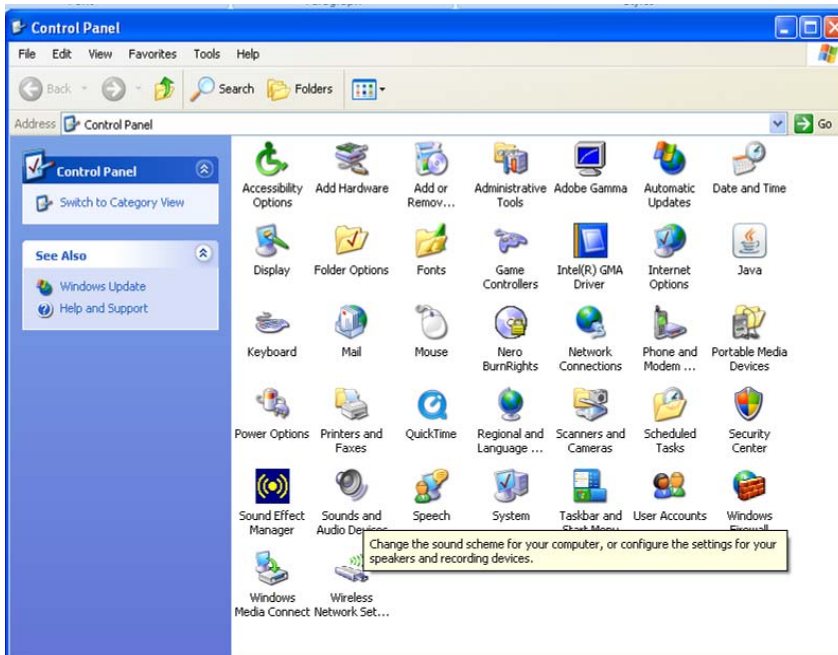
Open Audacity from your computer.
Plug in the earphones, making sure you use the right connections. Follow through with these instructions (designed for the non-techs) you will be ready to go.

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Check that the sound will work. You have to go into the control panel and make sure the adjustments are correct.



Choose sounds and audio devices



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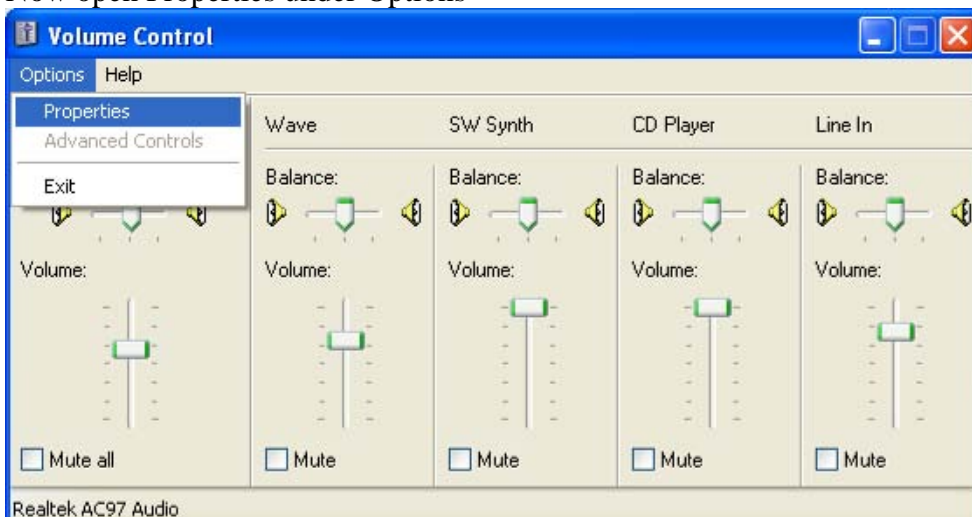
Under **Audio** just make sure the right sound device is selected.
Note that the sound recording and playback are on the correct setting: Realtek in this case.



Right click the volume control on bottom right of your screen to opening volume control

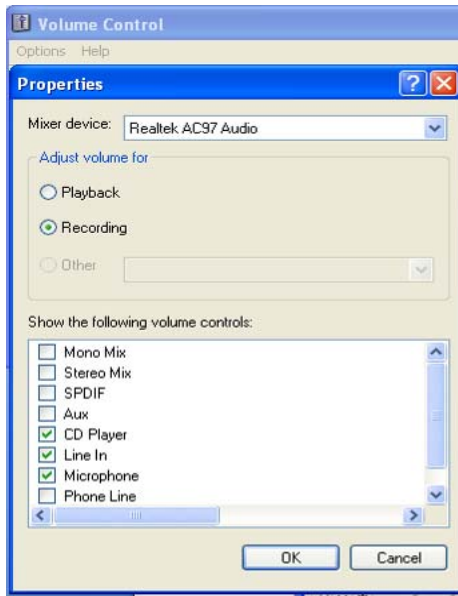


Now open Properties under Options

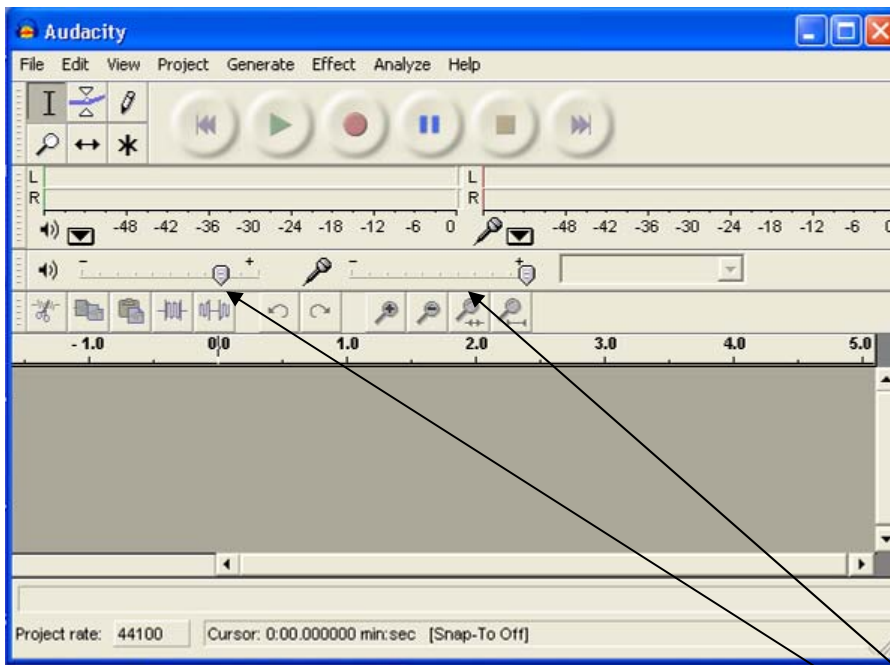


Make sure that when Recording is selected that the microphone also checked, then OK.

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Open Audacity and you will be greeted with this:

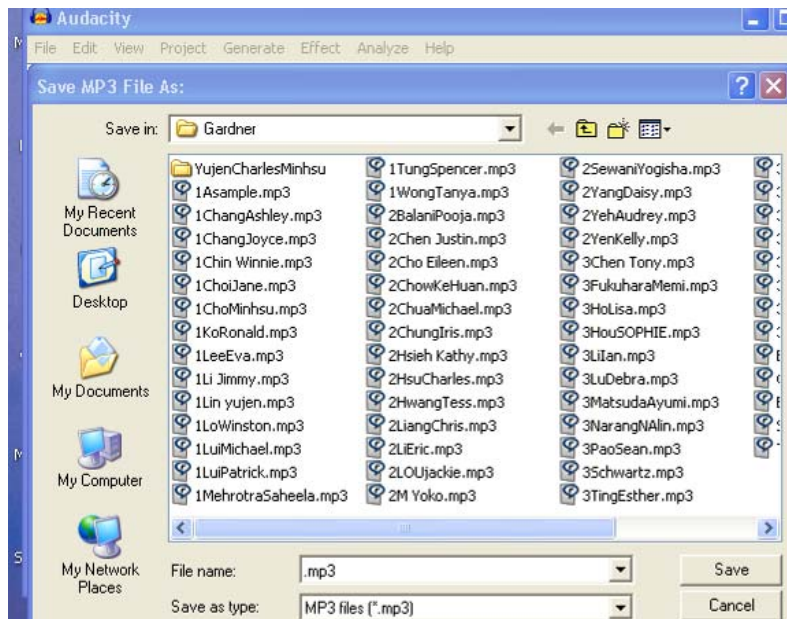


Check the recording and playback levels-moving the sliding bars higher or lower. Put on your earphones with microphone. Then press RECORD and start talking. While you are talking you will see the sound levels move so you will know you are recording.

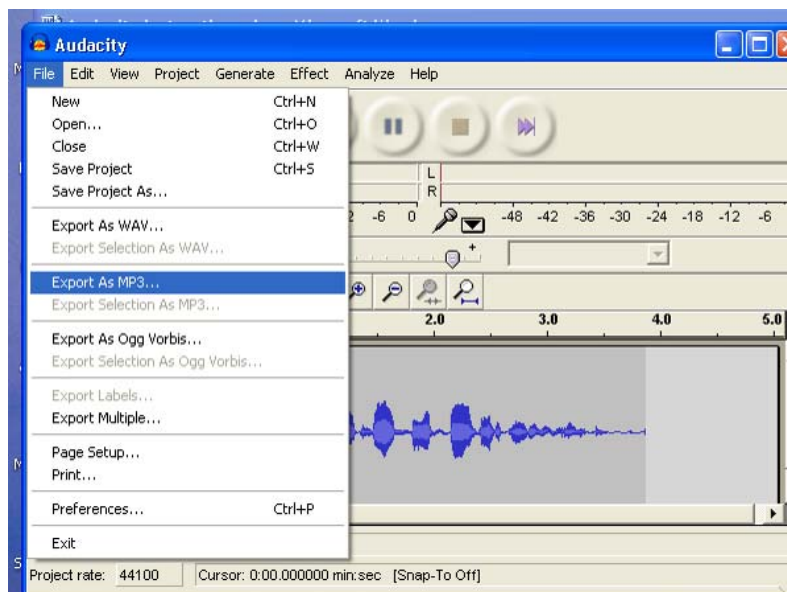
It is best to select PAUSE if you wish to stop part way. Then PAUSE again to restart. If you select STOP and RECORD again you will be recording on a new track.

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This can get confusing. I usually do one track only and pause as required. Try to keep your recording down to 9 minutes if you want to send files by email. Most email servers have a 10MB limit. My suggestion is not to go over 8mins for the first file. You can always stop and create a second file.



When finished I play the first few seconds to make sure it sounds OK. Finally I SAVE the file. Here I EXPORT TO MP3.



At this point I either save to the likes of the student server for students to pick up themselves OR I email. It does take a few minutes for each file to spool as it is being

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uploaded so I usually go on with the next student while the previous one is being uploaded. This minimizes time delay.

Once students have copied and pasted the file to either their thumb drive or iPod they can play it anytime. These files can be played with the default program on their computers(Windows Media Player etc).

Earphones are really helpful for the students because they can listen to the sound bite and blank out any other noise.

You can use Audacity and save in a **WAV** format BUT this means

- a. The files will be very large
- b. You really can't send them over email
- c. Students must have the Audacity program loaded to play the file.

When students receive files or retrieve them from the central file they are expected to listen to them several times. I get the students to annotate a paper copy of their essay/task with the comments I have made and show me the evidence of having listened to the file. Then students make the alterations before submitting the revised essay/task.

What you say on the file depends on your needs. I like to read aloud student work and add the comments as I go. This is also useful because students can hear problems in punctuation when another person reads their work.

Discussion:

What other experiences have teachers had with this type of learning?

What other programs are available of the same type?

How could you use Audacity in your program?

What other uses do you see for Audacity in the classroom?